



## Congressman Tom Udall



**Increases health care costs for 1 million veterans.** For the fourth year in a row, the budget raises health care costs for 1 million veterans by imposing new fees veterans costing them more than \$2.6 billion over five years and driving at least 200,000 veterans out of the system.

It would double the co-payment for prescription drugs from \$8 to \$15, and impose an enrollment fee of \$250 a year for category 7 and 8 veterans, who make as little as \$26,902 a year.

**Increases health care costs for military retirees.** The budget increases TRICARE health care premiums for 3.1 million of the nation's military retirees under 65. Premiums will double for senior enlisted retirees and triple for officer retirees by 2009 and drug co-payments will increase -- costing military retirees \$2.4 billion over five years. These fee increases of more than \$1,000 could drive more than 144,000 military retirees out of the TRICARE system, leaving them without the health care they earned through 20 years of service. It will undercut U.S. military strength even though there are serious problems in recruiting.

**Investments in veterans' health care still fall short.** As America continues to welcome a new generation of veterans home from Iraq and Afghanistan, the President's budget "plan has come up short of what's needed to honor America's commitment to veterans," according to the Disabled American Veterans. [Press release, 2/9/06] Because Democrats succeeded in investing more for veterans' health care last year, the President's budget provides about \$3 billion more than last year. However, it still remains \$1 billion less than veterans service organizations specify is needed, and is \$10 billion below the amount needed to maintain services at current levels over the next five years. Republicans have tried to mask the inadequacy with new fees on the backs of the veterans and \$1.1 billion in more so-called "management efficiencies." Last year, the Bush Administration shortchanged veterans' health care by several billion dollars, because they failed to take into account returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. And now, the Bush Administration estimates that there will be fewer returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan being served by the VA this year. No wonder a new Government Accountability Office audit has found the Bush Administration's budget numbers on veterans' health care to be unreliable.

**Continues to deny VA health care for new (priority 8) veterans.** On January 17, 2003, the Bush Administration stopped enrolling new Priority 8 veterans for VA medical care, and the President's budget continues this restrictive policy. This has prevented 1 million veterans, who make as little as \$26,902, from enrolling in VA health care.

**Fails to address the strain on our troops.** Despite recent reports of the tremendous strain that the Iraq and Afghanistan War have placed on our troops, the President's budget fails to fund and plan adequately to recruit to the number forces authorized by law. The budget would fund 17,100 fewer Army National Guard and 5,000 fewer Army Reserves than are authorized by law. Any additional National Guard forces recruited equipped and paid, will require taking funds from other Army programs. Many units are on their second or even third tour in Iraq or Afghanistan. At least 40 percent of those who have been deployed are from the Guard and Reserve. Further, the Defense Department's strategy reduces the Air Force by 40,000 and the Navy by more than 12,000, even as our military must be able to take on even more missions to face future threats.

**Fails to adequately equip our Army or include the cost of the war.** In the budget, the Bush Administration has not fully planned to fill equipment shortages so our military can fight in the future. In the past, they failed to predict the need for equipment and gear to protect our troops to plan fully to make sure that our troops will have all the equipment they need. There are about 150,000 men and women in uniform fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there is only \$50 billion in the Republican budget for America's military operations overseas next year. Republicans continue to attempt to hide the cost of this war by funding it through supplemental spending bills.

**Refuses to end the Disabled Veterans' Tax.** The President's budget fails to repeal the Disabled Veterans Tax, which forces disabled military retirees to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. The budget continues to require nearly 400,000 military retirees with service-connected disabilities to continue to pay the Disabled Veterans Tax.

**Fails to end the Military Families' Tax.** The Survivor Benefit Plan penalizes survivors, mostly widows of those killed as a result of combat. These widows lose their survivor benefits if they receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits because their spouse has died of a service-connected injury. The President's budget forces these 53,000 spouses to continue to pay this unfair tax, even though these families have made the greatest sacrifice for our country.

**Mental health services for Iraqi veterans fail to meet growing need.** An Army study shows that about one in six soldiers in Iraq report symptoms of major depression, serious anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder, and some experts predict that the number eventually requiring mental health treatment could exceed 170,000. Up to one-third of Iraq war veterans are suffering from some degree of PTSD. [UPI, 1/27/06] And yet, the President's budget calls for only about 14 percent more for post-traumatic stress disorder and mental health services than last year.

**Cuts funding for medical and prosthetic research.** It cuts \$13 million from medical and prosthetic research this year. This would set the research grant program back years, just as many of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are coming home with terrible injuries that require this expertise.